

THE INTERSECTION OF TEXT, GRAMMAR,
AND TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

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ABSTRACT: This article is an interdisciplinary study that examines the intersection of textual, grammatical, and translational issues across the biblical Hebrew canon. The examples come from instances of introduction to direct discourse, warning passages, and the signaling of background information.

KEYWORDS: Textual criticism, Hebrew grammar, translation

Introduction

The discipline of textual criticism, which is devoted to analysis of textual variation, is by no means an isolated subfield of biblical studies. It is an integral part of the exegetical process and is inseparable from the study of grammar and syntax, semantics, literary analysis, and intertextual relationships (Tov 2022: 323–33). Decisions about text and grammar ultimately affect how the Bible is translated. Furthermore, since there is no such thing as exact formal equivalency between two languages, the translation process often involves various modifications in order to make the transfer from the source language to the target language. Such changes are usually quite modest and serve to elucidate the original language for the target audience. There are, however, many places where the traditional or customary way of rendering certain biblical Hebrew expressions into English has gone unchecked. Some of the long accepted changes or additions have actually obscured the meaning of the original text. The present article is devoted to frequently overlooked examples of the intersection of textual, grammatical, and translational issues from across the biblical Hebrew canon in order to make a case for closer attention to this kind of detail in the hermeneutical enterprise. These examples include instances of introduction to direct discourse, warning passages, and the signaling of background information.

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Direct Discourse

Direct discourse in biblical Hebrew is normally introduced by a verbal form or infinitive of the root *'mr* ('say'). It is very rare to find an occurrence of a verbal form of this root that is not followed by direct discourse. When this does happen, the lack of direct discourse is so palpable that translators either supply the missing discourse or change the meaning of the introductory verb to something like 'speak,' which is more appropriate as a translation of the root *dbr*—a verbal root that does not introduce direct discourse without a following infinitive of *'mr*. Perhaps the most well-known example of this phenomenon is Genesis 4:8a ('And Cain said to Abel his brother...'). Since Genesis 4:8b presupposes that Cain and Abel have gone to the field, the Samaritan Pentateuch supplies the missing discourse at the end of 4:8a: 'Let's go to the field.' The Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, and Latin Vulgate translators have all followed suit, either because they had this text in their Hebrew *Vorlage* or because they made the same decision as the Samaritan Pentateuch to add what they felt was missing. It is also possible that either the Syriac Peshitta or the Latin Vulgate, or both, has/have followed the lead of the Septuagint.

The Palestinian Targum tradition (Tgg. Neof., Ps.-J., Frg. Tg., CG) has a slightly expanded form of this addition: 'Come and let the two of us go out to the field.' According to Alexander Samely, 'There can be little doubt that the same absolute use of "to say" in Gen. 4:8 is one of the main reasons for the elaborate targumic versions of this verse' (Samely 1992: 48). Samely refers not only to the modest expansion cited above but also to the second, much larger expansion in the latter part of the verse in which Cain and Abel have a dispute about whether there is mercy and whether there is judgment: 'It is possible that the longer dispute developed in response to a Hebrew *Vorlage* that used אמר without direct speech here, while, at a later stage, a fitting direct speech became known and was accepted as part of the original text, thus finding its place in the targum alongside the addition. But, as it stands today, the formal exchange between Cain and Abel (so little in keeping with the subsequent passionate deed) is a separate and independent speech unit and has no cohesion with the isolated אמר in MT' (Samely 1992: 48-49).

On the other hand, Targum Onqelos strictly follows the proto-MT and does not supply the missing discourse. Luther's German translation (*Da redete Kain mit seinem Bruder Abel*) and the early English translations (e.g., Tyndale, KJV) also do not supply the missing discourse. Both Tyndale and the KJV change the introductory verb from 'said' to 'talked.' Pamela Reis has more recently suggested the following translation, which also does not require added discourse: 'And Cain spoke against Abel, his brother' (Reis 2002: 107-113). The tendency of some of the more recent English versions has been to add the discourse (e.g., NET, NIV, NLT, RSV, TEV). The

truth, however, is that no one knows what Cain said to Abel, and the translations should indicate this with ellipsis points.

Exodus 19:25 and Numbers 14:14

The Hebrew text of Exodus 19:25 says, ‘And Moses went down to the people and said (*wayyo’mer*) to them.’ This would seem to indicate that the text is an introduction to the words of Moses, in which case Exodus 20:1 would be Moses’ own narrative introduction to the words of God, ‘And God spoke all these words, saying.’ The people witness God speaking the ten words to Moses (Exodus 19:16–19; 20:18–21; Deuteronomy 4:10–13; 5:4–5, 22–27), but Moses later reports the words to the people (Exodus 19:25–20:17) along with the terms of the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22–23:33). English versions, however, typically render *wayyo’mer* (‘and said’) in Exodus 19:25 as if it were *wayedabber* (‘and spoke’) or *wayyaged* (‘and told’) with no direct discourse to follow (e.g., KJV, NET, NIV, NLT, RSV, TEV; Kaiser 2008: 477). According to this rendering, Moses went down to the people and told them something, but there is no indication of what he said. The text of Exodus 20:1 is simply the voice of the narrator introducing the following words of God. The Palestinian Targum tradition senses the need for direct discourse after *wayyo’mer* in Exodus 19:25, but it decides to supply the expected discourse (Tg. Neof.: ‘Come near, receive the ten words’) and does not allow Exodus 20:1–17 to serve that purpose.

Another noteworthy example from the Pentateuch is Numbers 14:14: ‘and they will say (*we’ameru*) to the inhabitants of this land....’ The text breaks off at this point and indicates not what the Egyptians will say but what they have heard about the Lord. Thus, the tendency among English translations is to change the verb from ‘say’ to ‘tell’ (e.g., ESV, NET). Rashi observes, however, that what the nations (including Egypt) who have heard about the Lord will say eventually does appear in Numbers 14:16 after the reintroduction in Numbers 14:15b: ‘then the nations who have heard the report about you will say (*we’ameru*), saying, “Because the Lord was unable to bring this people into the land that he swore to them, he slaughtered them in the wilderness.”’ Another, less likely option is that Numbers 14:14 introduces indirect discourse: ‘and they will say to the inhabitants of this land that they have heard...’ (see Numbers 14:13). Likewise, Numbers 18:24b should not be rendered as indirect discourse (contra ESV, NET et al.) but as direct discourse (see Numbers 18:23b): ‘Therefore, I said (*amarti*) to them, “In the midst of the sons of Israel they will not have an inheritance”’ (not: ‘Therefore, I said to them that in the midst of the sons of Israel they will not have an inheritance’).

Judges 17:2 and 2 Samuel 21:2a

The first instance of absent discourse after *'mr* in the Former Prophets is MT Joshua 6:8 ('And so, as soon as Joshua said [*ke'emor*] to the people...'), but this text does not appear in the Hebrew source behind Old Greek Joshua (see De Troyer 2018: 26–32). The secondary nature of its addition in the MT is evident from the awkwardness created by the expectation of direct discourse that never occurs. The Hebrew text of Judges 17:2 features three verbal forms of the root *'mr*, two of which are followed by direct discourse: 'And he said (*wayyo'mer*) to his mother, "The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, and you uttered a curse, and also you said (*'amart*) in my ears..., look, the silver is with me; I am the one who took it." And his mother said (*watto'mer*), "Blessed be my son by the LORD.'" Only the second occurrence (*'amart*) does not have direct discourse after it. Rudolph Meyer has noted this conspicuous absence in the textual apparatus of *BHS*: *unum aut pc vb exc* ('one word or a few words is/are excluded').

English translations have for the most part opted either to change the meaning of *'amart* in Judges 17:2 from 'said' to 'spoke' (e.g., ESV, NRSV, RSV) or to paraphrase the clause in which it appears along with the preceding clause: 'and about which I heard you pronounce/utter a curse' (e.g., NET, NIV). These changes avert the problem of the missing direct discourse, but they do not faithfully represent the verb *'amart*. Moore suggests supplying the missing discourse from the context: 'And thou cursedst, and also saidst to me, "I sacredly consecrate the silver to Yahweh ... to make an idol"' (Moore 1895: 373; but see also Marcos 2011: 99*–100*). It seems best, however, to translate the verb according to its normal meaning ('said') and provide ellipsis points in the place of the missing discourse (cf. Genesis 4:8; see also LXX, Syr., Tg. Jon.). This shows the reader that the mother said something, even though what she said is not recorded.

2 Samuel 21:2a furnishes another example where the expected discourse is missing: "And the king summoned the Gibeonites and said (*wayyo'mer*) to them...." According to Rashi, David spoke to them words of appeasement to put aside their feelings and forgive Saul and his household. According to Redak, David's discourse here was essentially the same as that found in 2 Samuel 21:3. As with Judges 17:2, versions both ancient and modern reflect the choice not to supply the missing discourse. Rather, they tend either to change the meaning of the verb from 'said' to 'spoke' (e.g., ESV, NET, NIV) or to avoid it altogether (e.g., NLT). On the other hand, some leave the verb as it is (e.g., LXX, Syr., Tg. Jon., Vulg., KJV). Given the usage of *'mr* in the overwhelming majority of its occurrences, this latter option is preferable, although it would again be helpful for the reader if the translation were to include ellipsis points for the missing discourse.

Jonah 2:11a (Eng., 2:10a)

The Hebrew text of Jonah 2:11a (Eng., 2:10a) says, ‘And the LORD said (*wayyo’mer*) to the fish...’ There is no indication of what the Lord said to the fish. Targum Jonathan and the Latin Vulgate let this stand as it is, but most versions both ancient and modern change the meaning of the verb so that there is no expectation of any following discourse. The LXX, the Syriac Peshitta, and a number of modern English versions (e.g., NET, NIV, NLT) change the verb from ‘said’ to ‘commanded’ or ‘ordered.’ Others change the verb from ‘said’ to ‘spoke’ (e.g., ESV, NRSV, RSV). No one attempts to supply the missing discourse. Once again, the most judicious course of action is to translate the verb as ‘said’ and then to show the reader the missing discourse with ellipsis points (see Shepherd 2018: 229).

1 Chronicles 14:12; 2 Chronicles 1:2; 32:24; 35:25

The book of Chronicles has several examples of *’mr* not followed by direct discourse. The first example, 1 Chronicles 14:12, may be translated as follows: ‘And they left there their gods/idols, and David said (*wayyo’mer*)..., and they were burned with fire’ (cf. Tg.). The Chronicler’s source text in 2 Samuel 5:21 says, ‘And they left there their idols [LXX: their gods], and David and his men lifted them up.’ Some witnesses add either ‘and he said to burn them with fire’ or ‘and they burned them with fire,’ apparently under the influence of 1 Chronicles 14:12. The tendency among translations of 1 Chronicles 14:12 both ancient (Vulg.) and modern (ESV, KJV, Luther, NET, NLT, NIV, [N]RSV, TEV) has been to render *wayyo’mer* as ‘commanded’ or ‘ordered,’ which is a well-attested meaning for *’mr* in Late Biblical Hebrew (see BDB: 56). On the other hand, there is another word in Hebrew commonly used for this sense (i.e., the *piel* of *šwh*). The Syriac Peshitta takes a different approach to the translation of 1 Chronicles 14:12b. It infers David’s discourse from the last clause of the verse: ‘And David said to his men, “Burn them in the fire and scatter their dust in the wind.”’ The expansion (‘and scatter their dust in the wind’) appears to be based upon Exodus 32:20; Deuteronomy 9:21 (cf. 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:4, 6, 12, 15; 2 Chronicles 15:16; 30:14; 34:4; see Shepherd 2014: 78–80). On the other hand, the LXX converts the final clause of 1 Chronicles 14:12b into indirect discourse: ‘And David said to burn them with fire.’

The Hebrew text of 2 Chronicles 1:2 appears to introduce direct discourse (cf. LXX, Syr., Tg.): ‘And Solomon said (*wayyo’mer*) to all Israel, to the captains of thousands and hundreds and to the judges and to every leader of all Israel, the heads of the fathers...’ No direct discourse, however, follows this introduction. The Latin Vulgate renders the verb as ‘charged’ (*praecepit*) to alleviate this problem (cf. TEV).

Luther's German translation changes the verb from 'said' to 'spoke' (= *wayedabber*; cf. ESV, KJV, NIV; see also NET: 'addressed'; NLT: 'called together'). Rashi suggests that the implied discourse may be inferred from 2 Chronicles 1:3: 'And what did he say to them? That they should come with him to the high place that was in Gibeon' (cf. Redak).

2 Chronicles 32:24 offers yet another example in the book of Chronicles of absent discourse after *wayyo'mer*: 'In those days, Hezekiah was sick to the point of dying, and he prayed to the LORD, and he said (*wayyo'mer*) to him..., and a sign he gave to him' (cf. 2 Kings 20:1–11; Isaiah 38:1–8). The assumption is usually that the Lord is the subject of the verb *wayyo'mer* ('and he said'). The LXX translates 'and he heard him' rather than 'and he said to him' (cf. Vulg.). Several English translations render 'and he answered him' (ESV, [N]RSV; cf. NET, NIV; see also NLT). The Targum's expansion provides indirect discourse after *wayyo'mer*: 'and he said by his word to heal him and to add fifteen years to the days of his life, for it had been decreed by heaven to take away from the days of his life, and a sign he gave to him' (cf. 2 Kings 20:5–6; Isaiah 38:5). Wilhelm Rudolph's suggestion in the textual apparatus of *BHS* is to insert something like *marpe' ettenah lekha* ('Healing will I give to you') after 'and he said to him' (cf. 2 Kings 20:5b), assuming that this text has been accidentally omitted by homoioarchton (cf. 2 Chronicles 32:24b3: *umopheth nathan lo*). The Syriac Peshitta for 2 Chronicles 32:24b assumes that Hezekiah is the subject of the first two verbs: 'and he [Hezekiah] prayed before the Lord, and he [Hezekiah] said.' It then converts the final clause of the verse ('and a sign he gave to him') into the content of what Hezekiah prayed: 'Many wondrous deeds have you performed with me.'

The final example comes from 2 Chronicles 35:25: 'And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and all the male and female singers said (*wayyo'meru*) in their laments for Josiah to this day..., and they gave them as a custom in Israel; and look, they are written in the laments' (cf. LXX). According to the Targum, the leading men and women were saying the same lament as Jeremiah 'with him,' but exactly what the singers said in their laments is missing from the text. The Syriac Peshitta changes the verb 'said' from plural (*wayyo'meru*) to singular (= *wayyo'mer*) and has Jeremiah addressing the men and women: 'And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah and said, "All you righteous men and women, in your laments weep for Josiah," and to this day he gave them as the covenant of Israel; and they are written in the book of laments.' English versions either change the text to say that the male and female singers 'have spoken' of Josiah in their laments (e.g., ESV) or they paraphrase the text (e.g., NET).

Warning Passages

A warning in biblical Hebrew may be expressed either by the *niphal* imperative of the root *šmr* ('watch yourself') or by the *niphal* imperative of the root *zhr* ('be warned').

The meaning of these expressions as commands or prohibitions largely depends upon the presence or absence of a following preposition *min* ('from') or a following negation, but this important detail is sometimes disregarded (see Exodus 19:12; Sailhamer 1992: 51–57).

Ecclesiastes 12:12

The epilogue to the book of Ecclesiastes features a description of Qoheleth's scribal activities (Ecclesiastes 12:9–11) and a final exhortation from the author to his son or pupil (Ecclesiastes 12:12–14; see Fishbane 1985: 29–32; Longman 1998: 8). In the Masoretic Text, the *niphal* imperative of *zhr* ('be warned') in Ecclesiastes 12:12a stands over the *athnach* accent, which separates it from what follows in the syntax. This arrangement of the words has led most interpreters to conclude that Ecclesiastes 12:12a is a warning against something—either a warning against going beyond the words of Qoheleth referenced in 12:9–11 (e.g., RSV: 'My son, beware of anything beyond these') or a warning against the making of many books (e.g., KJV: 'And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is* no end; and much study *is* a weariness of the flesh'). In the latter case, the text is perhaps a warning against the very activity described in 12:9–11. That is, the author has possibly presented the words of Qoheleth to his son not in order to commend those words but to warn about them.

The text of Ecclesiastes 12:12a is likely intended to introduce the author's added instruction for his son after his presentation of Qoheleth's words: 'And more than these [or, in addition to these things], my son, be warned....' In other words, this is an introduction to the author's application of his presentation of Qoheleth's words to his son. Qoheleth has had many things to say, but the author wants to make sure that his son learns the most important lesson of all—the fear of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13; cf. Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10)—in light of the coming judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14). If the *athnach* accent in the Masoretic Text of Ecclesiastes 12:12 is disregarded, a close look at the syntax reveals that the *niphal* imperative of *zhr* ('be warned') belongs with what follows. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that the author is not warning his son off of something but warning him to be careful to do something.

If the *niphal* imperative of *zhr* in Ecclesiastes 12:12 is read with what follows it, the most straightforward way of rendering the text is found in the Targum: 'And more than these, my son, be careful to make many books of wisdom without end.' In the Hebrew text, the imperative ('be warned') is immediately followed by the infinitive *'asoth* ('to make'). There is no preposition *min* ('from') or any sort of negation between the imperative and the infinitive to indicate that the son should be warned

‘from making’ or ‘not to make’ (cf. Ezekiel 3:18, 21; 33:8–9). Furthermore, the phrase *ʿen qeš*, which is usually translated ‘there is no end,’ is better translated ‘without end’ in this context. The sense ‘without’ is well attested for *ʿen* (see BDB: 35).

What then should be made of the final clause of Ecclesiastes 12:12? This clause is usually rendered so that it fits with a warning against the making of many books: ‘and much study is a weariness of the flesh’ (KJV). Of the versions both ancient and modern, only the Targum sees the final clause of Ecclesiastes 12:12 as something to be done rather than something not to be done. Its rendering is a continuation of the first part of the verse: ‘And more than these, my son, be careful to make many books of wisdom without end and to be very busy with the words of the Torah and to contemplate the toil of the flesh.’ The Targum interprets *lahag* not as a rare noun (‘study’) modified adjectivally (‘much study’) but as an infinitive (‘to be busy’) modified adverbially (‘to be very busy’). Furthermore, the Targum understands this to mean to be very busy ‘with the words of the Torah.’ It is thus likely that the Targum’s interpretation of *lahag* comes from an analysis of the form as a combination of the preposition *l* (‘to’) plus *hg* from the root *hgh* (‘murmur’; see Dahood 1966: 409). The root *hgh* (‘murmur’) appears in Joshua 1:8 (‘This book of the Torah must not depart from your mouth, but you must murmur in it day and night’) and in Psalm 1:2 (‘but his delight is in the Torah of the LORD, and in his Torah he murmurs day and night’) where it describes reading aloud quietly to oneself the text of the Torah. The Targum then renders the phrase ‘weariness of flesh’ as ‘and to contemplate the toil of the flesh,’ perhaps based on the Torah’s teaching about the flesh in texts like Genesis 6:3.

On the basis of the above considerations, the following translation of Ecclesiastes 12:12 is suggested: ‘And in addition to these things, my son, be careful to make many books without end and to read much about the weariness of the flesh.’ Thus, the text is not a warning against too much bookmaking or too much study. Rather, the author is urging his son to go beyond the words of Qoheleth to make his own books and to study the Torah for himself. It is by means of such study that the son will learn the fear of God and thereby prepare himself for the final judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). After all, it is the stated purpose of the regular reading of the Torah to teach each subsequent generation the fear of the LORD (Deuteronomy 31:13; Ps 19:10 [Eng., 19:9]), which is the biblical definition of wisdom (Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; see also Deuteronomy 4:6).

Background Information

The biblical Hebrew verbal system consists of four main conjugations. The *wayyiqtol* or ‘imperfect’ with waw consecutive is the default narrative tense. Such narration may be given by a narrator or by a character in the narrative. The *yiqtol* or prefixed conjugation (a.k.a. ‘imperfect’) is the primary tense for discourse and is supplemented

by the *weqatal* (or ‘perfect’ with waw consecutive) for sequence in discourse. These “talking” tenses may appear in the mouth of a character, or they may be employed by the narrator to speak directly to the reader (e.g., Exodus 33:7–11). The *qatal* or suffixed conjugation (a.k.a. ‘perfect’) provides background information in either narration or discourse. This background information may make a backreference to something, or it may offer an explanation of something in the narration or discourse. The verbal forms thus serve to orient the reader to the narration (foreground), discourse (foreground), or background of the text (see Weinrich 2023; see also Niccacci 1990; Schneider 2016: 160–78).

Language users learn to associate specific grammatical forms with certain syntactical relationships and literary contexts in such a way that those forms begin to signal the relationships and contexts in which they most regularly occur. If the available forms of a particular kind are used interchangeably, then the system breaks down, and language users are no longer able to decipher what distinguishes one form from another. The same is true of the translation process. If, for example, the Hebrew verbal forms *wayyiqtol* and *qatal* are translated into English in such a way that the users of the target language cannot see the difference between the two, then the forms have effectively become interchangeable, and the distinction between the two types of signals sent by these two forms in the source text is lost in translation.

When the *qatal* verbal conjugation is understood simply as a past tense, complete action, or external aspect, there is great potential for confusion with the *wayyiqtol*. If there is a lack of recognition of the background function of the *qatal*, then the translator runs the risk of rendering it as a narrative tense indistinguishable from the *wayyiqtol*. This can result in all kinds of interpretative problems with regard to the sequence of the narration. The present section explores some of the more outstanding examples of this type of confusion of verbal conjugations and shows how it has affected translation and the history of interpretation.

Genesis 21:25

On the surface of most translations of Genesis 21:22–34, Abraham appears to make the same ‘agreement’ (*berith*) with Abimelech twice (see Rad 1973: 236): (1) ‘and the two of them made an agreement’ (Genesis 21:27b); and (2) ‘And they made an agreement at Beersheba’ (Genesis 21:32a). In both instances, the Hebrew text has the same *wayyiqtol* form (*wayyikhrethu*). Thus, it is not possible to explain the second occurrence as a reference back to the first one. Both verbal forms are continuations of the sequence of narration in which they occur. There must be something else in the context of this passage that indicates the relationship between the two.

The clue is the ‘*waw + qatal*’ (not *weqatal*) construction at the beginning of Genesis 21:25: *wehokhiah*. English translations are usually not clear about the function of this construction. Some translations render it as if it were a dependent, temporal clause: ‘When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water which Abimelech’s servants had seized’ (RSV). Others translate the verb as if it were a *wayyiqtol*, leading the reader to believe that it is simply a continuation of the narration: “Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized” (NIV). Some witnesses to the Samaritan Pentateuch’s version of Genesis 21:25 have *wayyokhiah* (*wayyiqtol*) rather than *wehokhiah* (‘*waw + qatal*’) (cf. LXX). Thus, readers both ancient and modern have had a tendency to understand Genesis 21:25 as a continuation of the narrative sequence from Genesis 21:24. What is lacking is any translation or explanation of the “*waw + qatal*” in Genesis 21:25 according to its normal function (background; cf. Genesis 15:6). Once this is done, the problem of the double occurrence of the agreement between Abraham and Abimelech is resolved.

The narrative of Genesis 21:22–24 features an exchange between Abraham and Abimelech in which Abimelech requests that Abraham swear an oath to him, and Abraham agrees. This narrative resumes in Genesis 21:32–34 with the formal making of the agreement between the two, the departure of Abimelech, and the concluding actions of Abraham. According to this main narrative thread, there is only one reference to the making of the agreement. The use of the *qatal* verb in Genesis 21:25 introduces a flashback that continues through verse 31. The reference to the making of the agreement in this section is not part of the main narrative. The relationship between the main narrative and the flashback may be illustrate as follows:

Genesis 21:22–24, 32–34 (Narrative)	Genesis 21:25–31 (Flashback)
At that time, Abimelech said, and Phicol the captain of his army, to Abraham, saying, ‘God is with you in all that you do. And now, swear to me by God here that you will not deal falsely with me or my offspring or my progeny. According to the loyalty that I have done with you, you will do with me and with the land in which you have sojourned.’ And Abraham said, ‘I swear.’	

	Now Abraham had rebuked Abimelech concerning the well of water that Abimelech's servants seized. And Abimelech said, 'I do not know who did this thing. And also you, you did not tell me. And also I, I have not heard except today.' And Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave (them) to Abimelech, and the two of them made an agreement. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What are these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?' And he said, For the seven ewe lambs you will take in order that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well.' Therefore, that place was called Beersheba, for there the two of them swore.
And they made an agreement at Beersheba. And Abimelech arose, and Phicol the captain of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. And he [Abraham] planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and he called there upon the name of the LORD, the eternal God. And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days.	

The flashback provides a point of reference for Abimelech's statement about his loyalty in Genesis 21:23. It absolves Abimelech of any wrongdoing in the former clash between Abraham and Abimelech's servants. The flashback then continues to the point that it intersects with the main narrative (the making of the agreement). Thus, the combined details of the main narrative and the flashback give the following sequence of events: (1) Abraham confronted Abimelech about the seized well (Genesis 21:25–26); (2) Abimelech requested that Abraham swear an oath (Genesis

21:22–24); and (3) Abraham and Abimelech made an agreement (Genesis 21:27–31, 32–34).

Jeremiah 40:8, 13

Some English translations of Jeremiah 40 give the impression that the coming of the officials to Gedaliah is narrated twice: (1) ‘So all these officers and their troops came to Gedaliah at Mizpah’ (Jeremiah 40:8a NET); (2) ‘Johanan, son of Kareah, and all the officers of the troops that had been hiding in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah’ (Jeremiah 40:13 NET). The Hebrew text, however, reveals a different relationship between these two verses:

At first glance, Jeremiah 40:13 (LXX 47:13) may appear in English translation to be a repetition of 40:8, but 40:13 does not continue the sequence of narration from 40:7–12. Whereas 40:8 has a *wayyiqtol* verbal form (LXX *Vorlage*: “And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah came [ויבא] to Gedaliah at Mizpah”; MT: “And they came [ויבאו] to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and [or, that is,] Ishmael the son of Nethaniah...”), the text of 40:13 has an “x + *qatal*” clause with a fronted subject: “And Johanan the son of Kareah and all the army officials who were in the country, they came (באו) to Gedaliah at Mizpah.” Thus, 40:13 backtracks to a previous point in the narration (40:8) where the officials came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. This time, however, Johanan rather than Ishmael appears as the lead figure, and it becomes apparent from the following verses why this is so (Shepherd 2023: 790).

Jeremiah 40:13 recalls the narrative of 40:8 but sets forth Johanan rather than Ishmael as the lead member in order to introduce the exchange between Johanan and Gedaliah about Ishmael.

2 Chronicles 32:25

The RSV translates 2 Chronicles 32:24–26 as follows:

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD; and he answered him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

This translation leads the reader to believe that the events are being recounted in chronological sequence. It appears to say that Hezekiah's pride only manifested itself after his recovery from illness, presumably in his reception of the Babylonian envoys (2 Kings 20:12–19). Thus, Hezekiah humbled himself only after he was confronted by the prophet Isaiah and thereby avoided disaster in his days. The visit of the Babylonian envoys, however, is not mentioned in the Chronicler's text until 2 Chronicles 32:31. Ralph Klein has suggested a different way to read the text of 2 Chronicles 32:24–26:

Williamson (386) argues that the judgment on Hezekiah is based on Isaiah's response to the reception given by Hezekiah to the Babylonian envoys (2 Kgs 20:14–18//Isa 39:3–7), and that Hezekiah's inappropriate reception of the Babylonian envoys is explained as due to pride brought on by Hezekiah's recovery from his illness. But Hezekiah's pride resulted from his escape from Sennacherib's invasion, and his and the people's humbling themselves in v. 26 brings the negative effect of his pride to an end (Klein 2012: 467, n. 40).

According to Klein, 'The Chronicler attributes Hezekiah's illness to his pride, an item not mentioned in the *Vorlage* but fully in line with the Chronicler's view of divine retribution: disease is a punishment for sin' (Klein 2012: 467).

Klein's view has much to commend it, including the syntax of the Hebrew text, which Klein does not mention in his commentary. The arrangement of the clauses in 2 Chronicles 32:24–26 may be illustrated as follows (see Sailhamer 1990: 319–35; the column labeled 'ATP' is for marking shifts in actant, time, or place):

Verse	Waw	Clause	Type	Level	ATP
1Chr32:24a1	-	x + <i>qatal</i>	verbal	narration	atp
1Chr32:24b1	+	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	verbal	narration	---
1Chr32:24b2	+	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	verbal	narration	A--
1Chr32:24b3	+	x + <i>qatal</i>	verbal	narration	---
1Chr32:25a1	+	x + <i>qatal</i>	verbal	narration	A--
1Chr32:25a2	<i>ki</i>	<i>qatal</i>	verbal	narration	---
1Chr32:25b1	+	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	verbal	narration	---
1Chr32:26a1	+	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	verbal	narration	a--
1Chr32:26b1	+	<i>lo</i> + <i>qatal</i>	verbal	narration	---

The first clause of 2 Chronicles 32:24a (x + *qatal*) establishes the background: 'In

those days, Hezekiah was sick to the point of death' (cf. 2 Kings 20:1; Isaiah 38:1). The narrative then continues with two *wayyiqtol* clauses: 'and he prayed to the LORD, and he said to him' (2 Chronicles 32:24b; cf. 2 Kings 20:2–3; Isaiah 38:2–3; see also Isaiah 38:9–20). The 'x + *qatal*' clause at the end of 2 Chronicles 32:24b adds that the Lord gave Hezekiah a sign (see 2 Kings 20:8–11; Isaiah 38:7–8, 21–22). This is not a continuation of the narrative sequence but supplemental information to what has been narrated thus far. Likewise, the two clauses of 2 Chronicles 32:25a have *qatal* verbs rather than *wayyiqtol* verbs and do not indicate what happened next in the story of Hezekiah: 'And it was not according to the benefit done to him that Hezekiah responded, for his heart was proud.' This provides the backstory that Hezekiah did not respond appropriately to the deliverance that the Lord gave him when Sennacherib threatened to invade him. The explanation for this inappropriate response is the pride of Hezekiah's heart, which led to divine judgment (i.e., illness; see 2 Chronicles 32:25b). The term *qesef* ('anger') in 2 Chronicles 32:25b is normally reserved for divine anger. Without repentance from Hezekiah, this anger would have led to the king's premature death with subsequent negative effects for Judah and Jerusalem.

The two *wayyiqtol* clauses in 2 Chronicles 32:25b and 32:26a narrate forward from the point referenced in 2 Chronicles 32:25a. Divine anger came upon Hezekiah, as manifested in his illness, and he was thus subdued in the pride of his heart. This corresponds to what was narrated in 2 Chronicles 32:24b1 ('and he prayed to the LORD'). The final clause (2 Chronicles 32:26b) has a *qatal* verb, but this is only because there is no way to negate a *wayyiqtol* verb. It indicates the result of Hezekiah's humbling of himself: 'and the anger of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.' This corresponds to 2 Chronicles 32:24b2–3: 'and he said to him, and a sign he gave to him.' According to the accounts in 2 Kings 20:4–7 and Isaiah 38:4–6, the Lord added fifteen more years to Hezekiah's life and rescued him and the city of Jerusalem from the king of Assyria.

The subsequent testing of Hezekiah in the sending of the Babylonian envoys mentioned in 2 Chronicles 32:31 (see 2 Kings 20:12–19; Isaiah 39) is a separate matter. Note the reference in 2 Chronicles 32:31 to the sign in 2 Chronicles 32:24b (cf. 2 Kings 20:10–11; Isaiah 38:7–8). Hezekiah's avoidance of falling into the hands of the Babylonians was not due to repentance from pride expressed in his reception of the envoys. It was simply because the Babylonians were not yet the world power and threat that they would later become well after Hezekiah's lifetime.

2 Chronicles 36:7

2 Chronicles 36:5–8 is the Chronicler's very brief account of the reign of Jehoiakim.

The Greek version has an expanded text of 2 Chronicles 36:5–6 based on material from the parallel account in 2 Kings 23:36–24:6. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:5a). The summary of his story is that he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord (2 Chronicles 36:5b). The Chronicler then refers the reader back to a moment not recounted in 2 Kings. Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jehoiakim and bound him in bronze fetters to take him to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:6; cf. Jeremiah 22:19; 36:30). This is not the same as the attack recounted in 2 Kings 24:1. The expanded Greek version has material from 2 Kings 23:37b–24:4 between 2 Chronicles 36:5 and 36:6. 2 Kings 24:6a only provides the death notice for Jehoiakim. It does not say how or where he died. 2 Chronicles 36:7 refers to Nebuchadnezzar's removal of vessels from the temple in Jerusalem and his deposit of them in his temple in Babylon (cf. Daniel 1:1–2). The narrative concludes with a source citation and a succession notice in 2 Chronicles 36:8.

It is not clear from English translations what the relationship of 2 Chronicles 36:7 is to 2 Chronicles 36:6. The surface impression from most translations is that Nebuchadnezzar exiled Jehoiakim and took the temple vessels when he invaded Jerusalem in 605 (see 2 Kings 24:1; Jeremiah 25:1; Daniel 1:1–2), and this is indeed the way most commentators have understood the text (e.g., Myers 1965: 217–18; Selman 1994: 567–68). According to this understanding, the 'x + *qatal*' clause in 2 Chronicles 36:6a followed by a *wayyiqtol* clause in 2 Chronicles 36:6b is coordinated with another 'x + *qatal*' clause in 2 Chronicles 36:7a followed by a *wayyiqtol* clause in 2 Chronicles 36:7b in order to refer the reader to two different parts of the same event: the taking of Jehoiakim to Babylon and the taking of the temple vessels to Babylon.

The chief difficulty with assigning the deportation of Jehoiakim referenced in 2 Chronicles 36:6 to the 605 invasion (2 Kings 24:1; Jeremiah 25:1; Daniel 1:1–2) is that 2 Chronicles 36:5 says that Jehoiakim reigned 'in Jerusalem' for eleven years (609–598). Furthermore, the LXX expansion at the end of 2 Chronicles 36:5 includes the material about the 605 invasion from 2 Kings 24:1, but this is separate from 2 Chronicles 36:6. The text of 2 Chronicles 36:6 does not begin as a continuation (*wayyiqtol*) of 2 Chronicles 36:5 but as a backreference (x + *qatal*) to something else. Likewise, the text of 2 Chronicles 36:7 does not begin as a continuation (*wayyiqtol*) of 2 Chronicles 36:6 but as a backreference (*waw* + x + *qatal*) to something separate. It seems that 2 Chronicles 36:6 refers to an exile of Jehoiakim that took place in 598 when he was replaced by his son Jehoiachin. Jehoiakim eventually died in Babylon, as Jeremiah says, 'beyond the gate(s) of Jerusalem' (Jeremiah 22:19; cf. Jeremiah 36:30). On the other hand, 2 Chronicles 36:7 does refer to the same removal of temple vessels in 605 re-

counted in Daniel 1:1–2. Since 2 Chronicles 36:7 is separated from 36:5 by 36:6, such a backreference makes sense even if the LXX expansion is included at the end of 36:5.

Conclusion

This article has explored the intersection of text, grammar, and translation in examples of introduction to direct discourse, warning passages, and the signaling of background information in the Hebrew Bible. Grammatical problems frequently generate textual variants designed to address those problems. Thus, the absence of direct discourse after *wayyo'mer* in Genesis 4:8a has led to the addition of the expected discourse in the Samaritan Pentateuch and perhaps also in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX. In at least one instance, the problem of the absence of expected discourse is not present in one witness to a text (LXX Joshua 6:8) but present in another (MT Joshua 6:8). Likewise, failure to recognize the background function of the *qatal* verb at the beginning of Genesis 21:25 has led to a change to a *wayyiqtol* in some witnesses to the Samaritan Pentateuch. Whereas these textual variants serve more to illustrate the problems than to resolve them, an expansion like the one that occurs between 2 Chronicles 36:5 and 36:6 in the LXX can actually help readers to see more clearly what the relationship between 2 Chronicles 36:6 and 36:7 should be.

Grammatical issues in the Hebrew text also generate attempts in translations both ancient and modern to make the text more intelligible for target readers. These are not textual variants per se, but they are intended to address problematic readings in a manner similar to that of Hebrew variants produced by scribes transmitting the text. The simplest examples of this are the many cases in which *'mr* ('say') is rendered as something other than an introduction to direct discourse (e.g., Exodus 19:25; Numbers 14:14; Judges 17:2; 2 Samuel 21:2a; Jonah 2:11a [Eng., 2:10a]). More complex are the creative efforts of the Syriac Peshitta to supply the missing discourse where *'mr* occurs (1 Chronicles 14:12; 2 Chronicles 32:24; 35:25). On the other hand, translations sometimes create unnecessary problems, such as when they render *qatal* verbs as if they were *wayyiqtol* verbs (e.g., Jeremiah 40:13; 2 Chronicles 32:25). Likewise, misinterpretation of the warning in Ecclesiastes 12:12 and its lack of negation has led to misplaced accentuation in the Masoretic Text and subsequent mistranslation that renders the text in a sense contrary to its intended meaning. Fortunately, the Targum preserves an ancient tradition of reading the Hebrew text that is more faithful to its grammar and syntax.

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